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ABSTRACT

This study compared the perceptions of state policy makers and representatives of public higher education institutions about how mandated student assessment practices affect the teaching and learning processes. Three states with mandated assessment policies were examined in depth; the states varied in geographic region, authority structure, and number of institutions of various types. Each state is analyzed in terms of: (1) policy background, focusing on the perceptions of state higher education executive officers regarding the match between the objective and outcome of improving teaching and learning through student assessment; (2) how representatives at the state's public institutions perceive the state policy; (3) approaches to student assessment used by public institutions in the state; (4) the amount of support evidenced by the state's public institutions for conducting student assessment; and (5) the impacts of conducting student assessment, as reported by the institutional representative. A summary section compares state administrator and institutional representative perceptions. The study identified three main themes: first, agreement between states and institutions on the importance of improving teaching and learning; second, confusion at the institutional level about state assessment requirements; and, third, variations in institutional commitment to assessment. (Contains 27 references.) (DB)

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Impacts of Student Assessment on Teaching & Learning: Differences Between State Policy Makers and Campus Representatives

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida, November 5-8, 1998. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

State-level initiatives, along with accrediting agency requirements, are cited as important direct influences on institutions' student assessment efforts (Ewell, 1993). More than 40 states have mandated assessment policies in place for public institutions of higher education. In response to such external demands, many colleges and universities have initiated some form of student assessment activity (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; El-Khawas, 1995). There has been little research, however, to inform us if these activities have led to improved educational quality, despite the reality that most states cite improvements in teaching and learning as two primary goals of their assessment mandates. Furthermore, we do not know if the perceptions state policy makers hold toward the outcomes of their assessment policies match the activities done, and the perceptions held, at the institutional level.

Based on some preliminary research conducted on behalf of the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, we have found that there are some states in which a policy maker reports that their student assessment policy was intended to improve teaching and learning in their state, but, in fact, has not. The purpose of this paper is to examine states with mandated assessment plans in which policy makers report such discrepancies between their policy objectives and their policy outcomes on improving teaching and learning. We will compare these policy makers' perceptions to the perceptions and activities of public institutional representatives in their state. Our three research goals are to gain a better understanding of 1) perceptions of campus representatives on how engaging in student assessment has affected the teaching and learning process on their campus; 2) perceptions of state higher education executive officers (SHEEOs) on how engaging in student assessment has affected the teaching and learning process at public institutions in their state; and 3) the extent to which these perceptions differ and why differences may exist.

Literature Review

We have created a framework for analyzing student assessment based on a recent literature review (Peterson, Einarson, Trice, & Nichols, 1997). The framework includes five environments: 1) the external influences on student assessment; 2) institutional approaches to student assessment; 3) the role of institutional characteristics in determining institutional approaches to assessment; 4) the institutional support, assessment policies and practices, and culture and climate for assessment; and 5) institutional utilization of and impact from student assessment results. In this report, we are focusing on discrete parts within each of these environments—examining how state policy mandates relate to approaches to, practices regarding, institutional uses of, and impacts of student assessment in public institutions.

Influence of the State on Assessment Activities

State-level actions are believed to be an important influence on institutional engagement in student assessment efforts. The majority of state-level assessment efforts originated in the mid 1980s following NIE's Involvement in Learning and other national reports that called for assessment of student learning (Aper, Cuver, & Hinkle, 1990; Ewell, 1993). Since then, the number of states enacting student assessment initiatives has increased steadily. According to recent research conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, all but four of fifty responding states reported some type of student assessment activity (Cole, Nettles, & Sharp, 1997).

Several studies have found that state requirements have spurred institutional activity. Hexter and Lippincott's (1990) review of three surveys of institutional engagement in student assessment activities found that external mandates from accrediting agencies, state legislatures, and boards of regents played a prominent role in prompting assessment initiatives, particularly at public institutions. In addition, half of the institutions reported utilizing student assessment results for reports to state agencies. Ewell (1993) stressed that state requirements have spurred activity both in assessment of entering students and in testing students' knowledge within the major.

However, other studies have found that institutions do not always comply with state requirements. Ewell & Boyer (1988) used interviews with state and institutional representatives

from five states engaged in state-mandated assessment to explore the relationship between state approaches to assessment and institutional responses. Unclear communication and lack of trust were noted as significant problems. State officials and institutional representatives were likely to interpret assessment terminology differently and seemed uninformed of differences in political and academic timetables. Three general categories of institutional responses were observed: some institutions actively resisted assessment mandates provoking state measures to obtain compliance; most institutions provided minimal information, giving the state only what it was presumed they wanted; and a few institutions took a proactive stance, developing and then selling locally developed assessment programs to state officials. In Ewell and Boyer's view, differences in institutional response were not related to institution type but to academic leadership choices. Institutional leaders often have a more difficult time selling assessment to internal constituents when it is perceived as an external mandate from either the state or an accreditation association (Ewell, 1993; Muffo, 1992).

Assessment Impacts on Teaching and Learning

Although engaging in student assessment activities is thought to contribute to several institutional impacts, in this study we are focusing on how such engagement impacts the teaching and learning process. The literature offers little direct evidence of changes in students' academic performance as a result of student assessment efforts (Banta & Associates, 1993; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996). A few institutions have reported improvements in student performance on standardized examinations (Bowyer, 1996; Krueger & Heisserer, 1987; Magruder & Young, 1996) and increases in students' mean grade point averages (RiCharde et al., 1993). The following impacts on currently enrolled students have been reported by some institutions: increased student involvement as reflected in time spent studying, frequency of academic-oriented discussion with other students, library usage (Krueger & Heisserer, 1987), interaction with faculty (Williford & Moden, 1993) and participation in class discussions (Friedlander, Murrell, & MacDougall, 1993); enhancement of students' attitudes toward their education including greater satisfaction with their instructional experiences and institutional services (Krueger & Heisserer, 1987, Williford & Moden, 1993), finding classes more challenging (Katz, 1993), and reporting greater seriousness about their studies (Ciereszko, 1987);

increases in freshman retention (Blanzy & Sucher, 1992; Walleri & Seybert, 1993); and an increased proportion of graduates pursuing further education (Young & Knight, 1993).

The impact of assessment on student performance has received less consideration in multi-institutional research. Compared to other uses of assessment information mentioned in the 1989 Campus Trends survey (El-Khawas, 1989), providing feedback to students was the use reported least often. Conversely, Johnson and colleagues (Johnson, Prus, Andersen, & El-Khawas, 1991) found improved student effort and feedback were among the main benefits that institutions with comprehensive student assessment programs associated with having implemented assessment efforts. Interviews with directors of fifteen pilot projects on student assessment undertaken in the California State University system revealed uncertainty regarding whether gains in student achievement had been realized as a result of assessment efforts (CSUITL, 1993). No direct evidence was found that related assessment efforts or the provision of assessment information with changes in student performance.

Descriptions of assessment practices at various institutions contend student assessment efforts have stimulated changes in the teaching methods and course-embedded assessment methods used by faculty (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Banta & Moffett, 1987; Lang, 1993). Associated changes in the nature of course-embedded assessments of student learning include the use of portfolio assessment (Katz, 1993; Loacker & Mentkowski, 1993; Young & Knight, 1993) with increased emphasis on critical thinking, and oral and written communication skills (Katz, 1993; Williford & Moden, 1993; Young & Knight, 1993). Institutions report having made the following changes in teaching methods and learning activities based on student assessment information: increased use of collaborative and cooperative teaching methods (Friedlander, Murrell, & MacDougall, 1993); introduction of computer applications (Walleri & Seybert, 1993; Young & Knight, 1993); development of an undergraduate research program (Young & Knight, 1993); incorporation of out-of-class learning activities in course requirements (Friedlander, Murrell, & MacDougall, 1993); and expanded internship and clinical experience opportunities (Young & Knight, 1993).

Evidence from multi-institutional studies regarding the impact of student assessment on faculty instructional and assessment practices is less available. Relative to other possible institutional uses, two-year institutions in Cowart's (1990) study infrequently reported using

student assessment information for the development of alternative instructional modes. Similarly, directors of fifteen pilot projects on student assessment in the California State University system were less certain about improvements in faculty teaching achieved as a result of assessment projects than they were about other project outcomes (CSUITL, 1993). We did not locate any comparative research regarding institutional or faculty engagement in student assessment efforts and changes in faculty approaches to instruction or assessment.

Methods

For this study, we chose three states as contexts for pursuing our research goals. The information we used to choose these three states stems from several sources. During 1996-97, we reviewed the literature of prior research on state assessment and regional accreditation policies, examined policy documents from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, discussed assessment policies and procedures with state higher education executive officers, and requested (and received) reactions from state higher education executive officers and accrediting officials to draft reports about their state/association. In December 1997 we mailed the State Higher Education Assessment Questionnaire to all 50 state higher education executive officers—to date we have received 38 responses.

In January 1998, we sent the Inventory of Institutional Support for Student Assessment to each Chief Academic Officer at 2,528 U. S. postsecondary institutions. We received 1,393 responses, for a response rate of 55%. Of these 1,393 institutions, 885 are public, which equates to a 60% response rate from all the public institutions we surveyed. Most surveys were completed by the Chief Academic Officer at each institution. This survey is a comprehensive inventory of external influences on undergraduate student assessment; institutional approaches to student assessment; patterns for organizational and administrative support for student assessment; assessment management policies and practices; and the uses and impacts of assessment information. We created a database to house the results of this survey--also included in this database are data from both the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the State Assessment and Regional Accreditation Policies study.

Our main criteria in choosing states was that the state higher education executive officer had reported that the improvement of teaching and/or learning was a policy objective of their

statewide assessment plan, and had *also* reported that the improvement of teaching and/or learning was *not* an achieved outcome of their assessment requirements. Once this overriding criterion was met, we chose states in which their SHEEO both had provided fairly detailed responses to our state survey and had provided extensive documentation during our document collection phase. Our final criteria focused on selecting three states from three different accrediting regions and with at least two different governance structures. As we only included public institutions in our analyses, the n's were: State A = 14, State B = 10, and State C = 26. Table 1 lists the types of institutions represented in our analysis.

Table 1
Public Institutions in States A, B, & C

	State A	State B	State C
Accrediting Region	North Central	New England	Southern
Authority Structure	Coordinating Regulatory	Coordinating Regulatory	Consolidated Governing
Institutional Type			
Associate of arts	8	6	19
Baccalaureate	2	1	0
Master's	1	3	1
Doctoral	2	0	3
Research	1	0	3
Total	14 (of 27)	10 (of 18)	26 (of 37)

Once we had chosen the three states, we performed both qualitative and quantitative analyses on our data. Qualitatively, we content-analyzed the student assessment documentation for each state and the responses that each SHEEO provided to the open-ended questions on our state survey. These analyses gave us a full picture of the policy objectives, the policy outcomes, and the reasons the SHEEOs gave for the mismatch between the objectives and the outcomes for improving teaching and learning.

Quantitatively, we examined frequency distributions and cross-tabs for the public institutions in each of our three states. Due to the low N's within each of our three states, we could not use ANOVAs to compare the results for institutions in our three states to those for all

public institutions. However, we do display these comparisons as a benchmark for how institutions in our three states compare to the rest of the country.

Throughout this report, we will refer to "campus representatives" and to "SHEEOs." The campus representatives are the respondents to our institutional survey: "Inventory of Institutional Support for Student Assessment." While this instrument was addressed to the Chief Academic Officer on each campus, it was completed by the person with the most knowledge and experience regarding student assessment. The SHEEOs are the state higher education executive officers who responded to the State Higher Education Assessment Questionnaire.

Results

For each state, we present six sections. In the first section, we describe the policy background for that state, focusing on the perception of the SHEEO on the match between the objective and the outcome of improving teaching and learning through student assessment. In the second section, we discuss how the public institutions in the state perceive the state policy. In the third section, we present the approaches to student assessment used by public institutions in the state. The fourth section consists of a discussion on the amount of support evidenced by public institutions in the state for conducting student assessment. The fifth section discusses the impacts of conducting student assessment, as reported by the institutional representatives. In the summary section, we will compare the SHEEOs' perceptions to those of the institutional representatives.

State A

Policy Background

State A had a student assessment system in place based on statute from 1989 through 1996. The statute was specifically designed to hold institutions accountable, both for the efficient use of state funds as well as for the provision of quality education. This statute did include a minor appropriations component; the state's higher education commission was authorized to withhold up to two percent of an institution's annual state appropriation if the institution did not comply with the terms of the statute. Under this statute, institutions were

required to measure the increase in knowledge and skills between entrance and graduation, with a focus on general education and learning in the discipline. Institutions also needed to measure student satisfaction, after-graduation performance, retention rates, and graduation rates.

In 1996, State A's legislature dramatically expanded the appropriations component with a new statute--which replaced and superseded the old statute and its requirements--that mandated the creation of a performance funding, or quality indicator, system. Among the areas to be evaluated by the quality indicator system are institutional performance, student satisfaction and success, employer satisfaction, and systemwide performance. One of the indicators requires the presence of a functioning student assessment system. Under this new statute, institutions have been required to report both their results based on their assessment system, and how they plan to improve these results.

State A's assessment statute has four objectives: (1) to increase accountability to the public; (2) to increase fiscal responsibility; (3) to improve teaching; and (4) to improve learning. By contrast, the SHEEO in State A reports three outcomes: (1) the improvement of student learning; (2) the promotion of planning on campuses; (3) the improvement of academic program efficiency. According to the academic officer, the improvement of teaching has not been an outcome of State A's assessment statute. One reason suggested by the SHEEO for this failure is the difficulty to measure and/or demonstrate an improvement in teaching to the state legislature. In other words, it may be a problem of perception (or definition) rather than of an unmet objective. Institutions may, in fact, be seeing incremental improvements in teaching, but they may be too small, too subtle, or too esoteric for legislatures to comprehend. Data from the institutions themselves should help to explore further this potential gap between policy objective and outcome in State A.

Institutional Perceptions of Policy

Before examining the assessment activities and impacts for the institutions in State A, it should be instructive to look at the institutional perceptions of the state policy. Our analysis focused on the 14 public institutions in State A who responded to ISSA survey. Details of the perceptions of these 14 institutions are presented in Table 2. While most of the institutions agree that there is a state plan for assessment (12) and all institutions agree that responding to state

reporting requirements is an important reason to engage in assessment, there is still confusion regarding the details of the state policy. Of the 12 institutions who agree that there is a state policy, six reported that the assessment plan was developed solely by state officials and six reported that it was developed jointly between state officials and campus representatives. (There was no clear pattern of institutional types represented in these differing views.) Most agreed that the state requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place (11), measurement of state-mandated indicators (10), and use of institutionally-devised indicators (8). However, only half of the institutions agreed that the state required evidence of institutional use of assessment data.

Table 2
Institutional Perceptions of State Policy in State A

Perception	Number Responding N=14
Meeting state reporting requirements is important reason to conduct assessment	14
There is a state plan requiring institutions to conduct assessment	12
• Assessment plan was developed solely by state officials	6
• Assessment plan was developed jointly between state and campus reps	6
State plan was reason to initiative assessment	7
State plan increased involvement with assessment	7
State plan had negative influence on assessment	2
State requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place	11
State requires measurement of state-mandated indicators	10
State requires use of institutionally-devised indicators	8
State requires evidence of institutional use of assessment data	6

Institutional Approaches to Student Assessment

The approaches that respondents use to gather student assessment data are listed in Table 3. Based on the mean scores on three factors—cognitive, affective, and post-college assessment--institutions in this state are collecting data for at least some students on post-college outcomes, but not all institutions are collecting data on either affective or cognitive competencies of their current students, despite the state mandate for assessment. The factor "affective competencies" includes student satisfaction, which was mandated by the state--all of the institutions in State A do report collecting data on student satisfaction.

Table 3
Approaches to Student Assessment in State A

Approach	Mean for Public Institutions in State A	Mean for all Public Institutions
Cognitive Assessment	1.64	1.62
Affective Assessment	1.75	1.74
Post-college Assessment	2.36*	2.27
Number of Instruments Used	8	9
Student-Centered Methods	1.28	1.30
Externally-Oriented Methods	2.34**	2.06
Number of Studies Conducted	2	2

*The scale for these three factors is 1 = not collected, 2 = collected for some students, 3 = collected for many students, and 4 = collected for all students.
**The scale for these two factors is 1=not used, 2=used in some units, 3=used in most units, 4=used in all units.

In addition to traditional instruments, the ISSA instrument asked institutions if they used student-centered methods for assessment, including portfolios, performance in capstone courses, and observations. Institutions in State A scored a 1.28 on this student-centered method factor. Apparently, these institutions are not making great use of student-centered methods for assessment. These institutions are more likely to be using externally-oriented than student-centered methods for assessment. The policy in this state explicitly requires institutions to measure employer satisfaction., and 11 of the 14 institutions report collecting data on students from employers. Institutions in State A appear to be responsive to the state policy, in terms of measuring both student and employer satisfaction. In addition, institutions in this state do not look remarkably different from public institutions throughout the country. However, the level of assessment conducted in this state is somewhat low—based on the cognitive, affective, and post-college factor scores--which is surprising given the state mandate.

Institutional Support for Student Assessment

Table 4 presents frequency information on institutional support for student assessment in State A, along with percentages for all public institutions. Although these percentages are not compared for statistically significant differences, they provide an idea of how institutions in State A behave within the context of all public institutions. While most institutions in State A reported that improving faculty instructional performance is an important reason to conduct assessment, two institutions did not believe this purpose is important, indicative of a lack of a uniform purpose to improve teaching via student assessment throughout the state. Furthermore, only one-quarter of the respondents replied that they have a faculty governance committee that addresses assessment, indicating a lack of a formal process across institutions for faculty to discuss student assessment issues. For all public institutions, 50% responded that they had a faculty committee that addressed assessment. Respondents in State A also reported that, on average, 50% of their existing faculty governance committees were supportive of student assessment. For all public institutions, 65% of their governance committees are reported to be supportive of student assessment. Not only may there be less support in State A, but if only 50% of the faculty governance committees are supportive of student assessment, it is likely that on only half of these campuses are faculty taking student assessment seriously or considering its impact for their teaching. Nonetheless, most campuses in State A are providing opportunities for professional development for faculty in the form of conference funds and workshops. More than half of all institutions require at least some of their faculty to engage in student assessment.

Table 4
Support for Student Assessment in State A

Support For Assessment	Percentage of Institutions in State A N=14	Percentage of all Public Institutions N=885
Refer to assessment in mission	7%	23%
Engage in assessment to improve faculty performance	85%	93%
Formally adopted policy requiring assessment in all units	57%	51%
Faculty governance committee addresses student assessment	25%	50%
Faculty governance committees are supportive of assessment	50%	65%
Conference funds are available for faculty	100%	87%
Workshops are offered for faculty	71%	79%
Faculty required to receive assessment training	57%	59%
Faculty assistance is offered (i.e. paid leaves, stipends, course reductions)	50%	53%

The survey also asked respondents to indicate how student assessment relates to faculty evaluation and rewards. Table 5 displays the institutional responses from State A. While all institutions in State A encourage faculty to assess their students, relatively few tie such assessment to tenure, promotion, or salary increases. In comparison with all public institutions, fewer institutions in State A are considering student performance in faculty evaluations or assessment participation in promotion. Furthermore, fewer institutions in State A are publicly awarding faculty for their participation in assessment.

Table 5
Faculty Evaluation and Rewards in State A

Faculty Evaluation and Rewards Policies	Percentage of Institutions in State A	Percentage of all Public Institutions
Faculty encouraged to assess students	100%	93%
Scholarship on student assessment considered for tenure	38%	43%
Evaluation for salary increases considers student performance	21%	22%
Willingness to participate in assessment considered in promotion	21%	39%
Faculty receive awards for assessment	21%	33%
Hiring process considers assessment experience	15%	38%
Evaluation for promotion considers student performance	14%	30%

Institutional Impacts of Student Assessment

In addition to exploring institutional approaches to and support for student assessment, our survey allows us to examine the impacts institutions ascribe to their assessment efforts. This section of the survey was presented in two segments: institutional actions and institutional impacts. In regards to actions, institutions were asked whether they used student assessment data in various institutional activities. One of these activities was "modifying instructional or teaching methods." In State A, nine of the 14 respondents (64%) responded that action had been taken to modify instructional methods and that student assessment data had been influential in this modification. This percentage compares to 59% for all public institutions.

Survey respondents also reported whether they have monitored how student assessment impacts on various faculty activities, such as campus discussions of undergraduate education, interest in teaching, and the changes in teaching methods. Table 6 displays how respondents in State A answered these questions.

Table 6
Impacts of Student Assessment on Faculty in State A

Impact	Number of Institutions Monitoring	Number of Institutions Finding Positive Impact
Changes in Instructional Methods Used	8	7
Discussions of Undergraduate Education	8	6
Faculty Interest in Teaching	3	1
Faculty Satisfaction	4	0

Apparently, several institutional representatives in State A have found that student assessment has led to changes in instructional methods used by faculty as well as to an increased focus on undergraduate education. Fewer institutions are examining whether student assessment has impacted faculty interest in teaching and faculty satisfaction; those that have monitored these two realms have not, on the whole, found positive impacts.

Summary for State A

In terms of policy perception, there is confusion in State A regarding how the state plan for assessment was developed and what it requires. While the types and frequency of student assessment data collected mirrors all public institutions throughout the country, institutions in this state are collecting neither cognitive nor affective data on the majority of their students. Neither are they making extensive use of student-centered methods for data collection, such as portfolios, observations, and capstone courses.

In terms of institutional support for student assessment, most respondents stressed that they engage in student assessment to improve faculty instructional performance, indicating that they share this policy objective. Institutions in State A are providing opportunities for professional development for faculty to learn about student assessment. However, they are not tying assessment participation or results to faculty promotion or tenure considerations. Finally, less than half of faculty governance committees in State A are supportive of student assessment.

Respondents from State A do believe that assessment has impacted teaching by focusing faculty attention on undergraduate education and on changing teaching methods. The

implication is that student assessment has had positive impacts on teaching—an opposite belief to that held by SHEEOs in the state. While respondents to the survey believe that assessment has improved teaching, their answers also provide a glimpse of their assessment activity level. The depth of assessment activity and the faculty support for assessment are all somewhat questionable in State A. Perhaps legislators are aware of the relative lack of support, which may be adding to their speculations of the impact assessment has on teaching.

State B

Policy Background

State B has required institutions to assess institutional effectiveness and make a report of their progress since 1988. Institutions were to report to the state board of higher education. In developing this policy, the state board noted that the overall objective of assessment was to enhance the quality of instruction and student performance. In 1993, State B's legislature mandated biennial assessment of institutional effectiveness, and further required that the results of this assessment be reported not only to higher education officials but also to appropriate committees in the state legislature. Three years later, in 1996, the state board of higher education issued guidelines for these reports. They stipulated that institutions assess general education and basic skills, as well as student performance, attainment, and development. The 1993 statute and 1996 reporting guidelines seem to be the state's attempt to provide legislative force behind the 1988 policy.

State B's assessment statute has four objectives: (1) to improve teaching; (2) to improve student learning; (3) to promote planning on campuses; and (4) to improve academic program efficiency. By contrast, the SHEEO in State B reports two assessment policy outcomes: (1) the promotion of planning on campuses; and (2) the improvement of academic program efficiency. According to him, neither the improvement of teaching nor the improvement of student learning has been an outcome of State B's assessment statute. Among the reasons offered by the state officer for this disconnect are a lack of resources necessary to implement assessment activities and a lack of commitment to assessment on the part of faculty. According to the state officer, the relationship between the assessment statute and the improvement of teaching and learning is weak because the primary emphasis is on feedback from graduate surveys, as well as program

reviews. It should be informative to compare the findings of institutional-level data to the state officer's perceptions for State B.

Institutional Perceptions of Policy

Table 7 presents information on the institutions' perceptions of the state policy. All of the 10 public institutions in State B who responded to the ISSA survey agreed that there was a state plan for assessment and all responded that meeting state reporting requirements was an important reason for conducting student assessment. While these responses indicate a fairly uniform level of knowledge throughout the state, 6 institutions reported that the plan had been developed jointly between campus and state officials and 4 institutions reported that it had been developed only by state level officials. There was no clear pattern of institutional types represented in these differing views.

Table 7
Institutional Perceptions of State Policy

Perception	Number Responding N=10
Meeting state reporting requirements is important reason to conduct assessment	10
There is a state plan requiring institutions to conduct assessment	10
• Assessment plan was developed solely by state officials	6
• Assessment plan was developed jointly between state and campus reps	4
State plan was reason to initiative assessment	5
State plan increased involvement with assessment	8
State plan had negative influence on assessment	1
State requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place	9
State requires measurement of state-mandated indicators	4
State requires use of institutionally-devised indicators	6
State requires evidence of institutional use of assessment data	6

Almost all of the institutional representatives (n=9) in State B agreed that the state requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place. Consensus on other aspects of the state plan, however, are mixed. Of the 10, 4 institutions believe that state reporting requirements include evidence of measurement of state-mandated indicators, 6 institutions believe that the state reporting requirements include use of institutionally-devised indicators, and 6 institutions

believe that the state reporting requirements include evidence of institutional use. Evidently, there is some confusion regarding what the state plan requires.

Institutional Approaches to Student Assessment

Respondents to the ISSA survey categorized both the types of assessment data they were collecting and the extent to which they collected this data. This data is presented in Table 8. Institutions in this state are collecting data for at least some students on post-college outcomes, but not all institutions are collecting data on either affective or cognitive competencies of their current students, despite the state mandate for assessment. It is likely that SHEEOs are aware that more effort is apparently spent on collecting data on former students and, although this pattern is not unique to this state, it may not be what policy makers had intended by their student assessment policy.

Table 8
Approaches to Student Assessment in State A

Approach	Mean for Public Institutions in State B	Mean for all Public Institutions
Cognitive Assessment	1.53	1.62
Affective Assessment	1.85	1.74
Post-college Assessment	2.28*	2.27
Number of Instruments Used	9	9
Student-Centered Methods	1.23	1.30
Externally-Oriented Methods	2.15**	2.06
Number of Studies Conducted	2	2

*The scale for these three factors is 1 = not collected, 2 = collected for some students, 3 = collected for many students, and 4 = collected for all students.
**The scale for these two factors is 1=not used, 2=used in some units, 3=used in most units, 4=used in all units.

On average, institutions in State B used 9 instruments (both institutionally and externally developed) to collect student assessment data, which is the same number used on average by public institutions throughout the country. In addition to traditional instruments, the ISSA instrument asked institutions if they used student-centered methods for assessment, including portfolios, performance in capstone courses, and observations. The ISSA instrument also asked

about the use of externally-oriented assessment methods, such as interviews with employers and alumni. Institutions are more likely to be using external than student-centered methods for assessment (see Table 8), as perceived by the SHEEO.

Institutional Support for Student Assessment

Table 9 presents data regarding institutional support for student assessment in State B. All responding institutions believe that improving student performance is an important purpose for conducting student assessment, and almost all believe that improving faculty performance is an important purpose. Apparently, institutions in State B share the goals of the SHEEO to improve both teaching and learning through student assessment. Respondents in State B reported that, on average, 67% of their faculty governance committees were supportive of student assessment and 44% of the institutions responded that their students were supportive of assessment. While these percentages are slightly higher than are those for all public institutions, support for assessment is not pervasive in this state. Furthermore, only half of the campuses reported that there was a formal faculty committee that addressed student assessment issues.

Table 9
Support for Student Assessment in State B

Support For Assessment	Percentage of Institutions in State B N=10	Percentage of all Public Institutions N=885
Refer to assessment in mission	20%	23%
Engage in assessment to improve faculty performance	89%	93%
Engage in assessment to improve student achievement	100%	98%
Formally adopted policy requiring assessment in all units	50%	51%
Faculty governance committee addresses student assessment	50%	50%
Faculty governance committees are supportive of assessment	67%	65%
Students are supportive of assessment	44%	33%
Provide a line item operating budget allocation to support assessment	20%	50%
Conference funds are available for faculty	86%	87%
Workshops are offered for faculty	87%	79%
Faculty required to receive assessment training	60%	59%
Faculty assistance is offered (i.e. paid leaves, stipends, course reductions)	50%	53%

Table 9 also presents information on professional development efforts in State B. Most institutions provide conference funds and workshops, and many require faculty to receive training in student assessment. In half of the responding institutions, faculty assistance is available (i.e. paid leaves, stipends, course reductions) for those who would like to learn more about assessment. These percentages are extremely similar to those for all public institutions. These percentages indicate that there are resources available at most institutions in State B to support faculty in their assessment efforts. However, only two of the ten public institutions in State B have established an explicit line item operating budget allocation to support assessment. This number compares to 50% of all public institutions who have established an explicit line item operating budget allocation to support assessment.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate how student assessment relates to faculty evaluation and rewards. Table 10 displays their responses. While all institutions in State B encourage faculty to assess their students, relatively few tie such assessment to tenure, promotion, or salary increases. In comparison with all public institutions, fewer institutions in State B are considering student performance in faculty evaluations or assessment participation or scholarship in promotion. No institutions in State B are rewarding faculty for assessment. However, many more institutions in State B are considering assessment experience in the hiring process. Perhaps this consideration indicates that institutions in State B realize that they need to increase their student assessment activities.

Table 10
Faculty Evaluation and Rewards in State B

Faculty Evaluation and Rewards Policies	Percentage of Institutions in State B	Percentage of all Public Institutions
Faculty encouraged to assess students	100%	93%
Hiring process considers assessment experience	63%	38%
Scholarship on student assessment considered for tenure	22%	43%
Evaluation for salary increases considers student performance	11%	22%
Willingness to participate in assessment considered in promotion	11%	39%
Evaluation for promotion considers student performance	11%	30%
Faculty receive awards for assessment	0	33%

Respondents also reported on their student-oriented policies on student assessment (see Table 11). Most institutions actively involve students in the assessment process— all responding institutions provide students with individual feedback, 89% of the institutions inform the students about the purposes of assessment, and 67% of responding institutions require at least some of their students to participate in student assessment activities. Only 11% of responding institutions encourage student participation with incentives. In comparison with all public institutions, 88% of all responding public institutions require at least some of their students to participate in student assessment activities and 40% encourage students to participate with incentives.

Table 11
Student-Oriented Policies on Student Assessment

Student Policies	Percentage of Institutions in State B	Percentage of all Public Institutions
Provide students with individual feedback	100%	85%
Inform students about the purpose for assessment	89%	88%
Require students to participate in assessment	67%	88%
Encourage participation with incentives	11%	40%

Institutional Impacts of Student Assessment

In addition to exploring institutional approaches to and support for student assessment, our survey results allow us to examine the actions and impacts institutions ascribe to their assessment efforts. Responses to questions in the survey relating to improving the learning process are presented in Table 12. A majority of institutions in State B are using assessment data to modify instructional methods, academic programs, and support services. These initiatives demonstrate an effort to use assessment results to improve the learning process. However, as the SHEEO in State B stressed, program review and other related activities do not necessarily equate with improvements in the learning process.

Table 12
Institutional Actions Using Student Assessment Data

Institutional Actions	Action Taken/Data on Assessment Influential in State B	Action Taken/Data on Assessment Influential for all Public Institutions
Modify instructional methods	70%	60%
Design/reorganize academic programs	70%	62%
Modify academic support services	60%	63%
Revise academic mission	20%	41%
Revise gen ed curriculum	20%	57%

Survey respondents also reported whether they have monitored how student assessment impacts on various faculty activities. Table 13 displays how respondents in State B answered these questions. Of the institutions monitoring how assessment has impacted on instructional methods, all found a positive impact. Only a small number of institutions are examining whether assessment is impacting faculty in terms of their interest in teaching and their satisfaction in general.

Table 13
Student Assessment Impacts on Faculty Activities in State B

Impact	Number of Institutions Monitoring	Number of Institutions Finding Positive Impact
Changes in Instructional Methods Used	4	4
Discussions of Undergraduate Education	3	1
Faculty Interest in Teaching	1	1
Faculty Satisfaction	1	0

Survey respondents also reported how engaging in student assessment has impacted their students. Table 14 summarizes these responses. Less than a third of all public institutions in State B are monitoring the impact assessment has on student achievement in these four realms. Of those that are monitoring, not all are finding that their assessment initiatives have positive impacts on student achievement. Perhaps it is most troubling that only one of ten institutions are attempting to link their assessment activities to student grades.

Table 14
Student Assessment Impacts on Student Performance

Impact	Number of Institutions Monitoring	Number of Institutions Finding Positive Impact
Student retention or graduation rates	3	1
Student satisfaction	3	2
Student achievement on external exams	2	1
Student grade performance	1	0

State B Summary

According to the SHEEC in State B, the improvement of teaching and learning are objectives of that state's assessment plan, but they are not outcomes. Two reasons suggested by the academic officer for this disparity are lack of campus resources to implement assessment and lack of faculty commitment to assessment. At the institutional level, only 11% of respondents in State B indicated that promotions and/or salary increases are linked to student assessment or performance. Perhaps the state-level perception that there is little faculty commitment to assessment is a reflection of the very limited use of assessment as a part of any faculty rewards or incentives structure at the institutions. Further, only 20% of institutions have established an explicit line item in their budgets for assessment, which is much lower than the national average of 50%. This could help to explain the perception held by the state academic officer that there is a lack of campus resources used to implement assessment. Despite an apparent lack of resources dedicated to student assessment, many more institutions in State B are considering assessment experience in the hiring process for faculty positions. Perhaps this consideration indicates that administrators and faculty in State B realize that they need to increase their student assessment activities.

State C

Policy Background

State C was one of the first states to use statewide standardized testing as a means of assessment, implementing such a testing policy in the early 1980s. This test was designed to ensure that graduates of two-year programs had the basic skills necessary for success and to track whether the students were entering the workforce or continuing on to a four-year degree program. In 1988, the legislature in State C mandated the assessment of the general education curriculum in all two- and four-year institutions. In 1991, the state legislature established a series of accountability reporting requirements for State C's public institutions.

These requirements were revisited in 1994, when the state legislature articulated a stronger link between institutional accountability plans and state educational goals, including

access/diversity, quality of undergraduate education, and productivity. The interest in linking accountability plans to state educational goals stemmed from the opinion of some state policy makers that "existing legislation and institutional responses did not sufficiently embody the kinds of characteristics that would lead to improved management at the local level and provide for systematic, ongoing assessment." (Reference: State C's 1994 Accountability Review Report.)

State C's assessment statute has six objectives: (1) to increase accountability to the public; (2) to increase fiscal responsibility; (3) to improve teaching; (4) to improve student learning; (5) to promote planning on campuses; and (6) to improve academic program efficiency. However, the state academic officer reports only one outcome: an increase in accountability to the public. No reason was given by the academic officer for this striking divergence between objectives and outcomes. Data from the institutions may shed some light on the causes of this divergence.

Institutional Perceptions of Policy

Table 15 presents the institutional perceptions of the state policy for respondents in State C. Five of the 26 public institutions who responded to the ISSA survey do not believe that there is a state plan for assessment. However, 25 of the 26 institutions responded that meeting state reporting requirements is an important purpose for engaging in assessment. Apparently, at least four institutions do not believe there is a state plan, yet agree that there are state reporting requirements. Of the 21 who believe there is a state plan, 14 institutions reported that the plan had been developed jointly and 7 institutions reported that it had been developed by state level officials.

Table 15
Institutional Perceptions of State Policy

Perception	Number Responding N=26
Meeting state reporting requirements is important reason to conduct assessment	25
There is a state plan requiring institutions to conduct assessment	21
• Assessment plan was developed solely by state officials	14
• Assessment plan was developed jointly between state and campus reps	7
State plan was reason to initiative assessment	17
State plan increased involvement with assessment	18
State plan had negative influence on assessment	1
State requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place	17
State requires measurement of state-mandated indicators	25
State requires use of institutionally-devised indicators	15
State requires evidence of institutional use of assessment data	10

Agreement on aspects of the state plan vary. Most (25) believe that state reporting requirements include evidence of measurement of state-mandated indicators. Apparently, State C has effectively communicated and promoted the use of its mandated indicators. However, only 17 of the institutions in State C agree that the state requires evidence that an assessment plan is in place, 15 respondents believe that the state reporting requirements include use of institutionally-devised indicators, and only 10 respondents believe that the state reporting requirements include evidence of institutional use. Differing opinions were not split by institutional type, ruling out the possibility that the state requires different activities for different types of institutions. There is apparently some confusion in State C regarding what the plan actually stipulates.

Institutional Approaches to Student Assessment

Respondents to the ISSA survey categorized both the types of assessment data they were collecting and the extent to which they collected this data (See Table 16). Institutions in this state are collecting data for at least some students on post-college outcomes, but not all institutions are collecting data on either affective or cognitive competencies of their current students, despite the state mandate for assessment. The cognitive competencies factor includes the measurement of general education. The assessment policy in State C mandates the assessment of general education. Nevertheless, 35% of our respondents do not measure general

education competencies in students, 31% collect this data for some or many students, and only 35% collect this data for all students.

Table 16
Approaches to Student Assessment in State C

Approach	Mean for Public Institutions in State C	Mean for all Public Institutions
Cognitive Assessment	1.43	1.62
Affective Assessment	1.69	1.74
Post-college Assessment	2.24*	2.27
Number of Instruments Used	8	9
Student-Centered Methods	1.20	1.30
Externally-Oriented Methods	2.01**	2.06
Number of Studies Conducted	3	2

*The scale for these three factors is 1 = not collected, 2 = collected for some students, 3 = collected for many students, and 4 = collected for all students.
**The scale for these two factors is 1=not used, 2=used in some units, 3=used in most units, 4=used in all units.

In addition to traditional instruments, the ISSA survey asked institutions if they used student-centered methods for assessment, including portfolios, performance in capstone courses, and observations. The ISSA instrument also asked about the use of externally-oriented assessment methods, such as interviews with employers and alumni. Institutions are more likely to be using external than student-centered methods for assessment.

Institutional Support for Student Assessment

Table 17 presents information on institutional support for student assessment in State C. All of the respondents from State C reported that both improving faculty instructional performance and improving undergraduate student performance were important purposes for conducting assessment. Apparently, institutions share the goals of the SHEEO to improve both teaching and learning.

Table 17
Support for Student Assessment in State C

Support For Assessment	Percentage of Institutions in State C N=26	Percentage of all Public Institutions N=885
Refer to assessment in mission	28%	23%
Engage in assessment to improve faculty performance	100%	93%
Engage in assessment to improve student achievement	100%	98%
Formally adopted policy requiring assessment in all units	40%	51%
Faculty governance committee addresses student assessment	25%	50%
Faculty governance committees are supportive of assessment	58%	65%
Students are supportive of assessment	42%	33%
Provide a line item operating budget allocation to support assessment	58%	50%
Conference funds are available for faculty	80%	87%
Workshops are offered for faculty	67%	79%
Faculty required to receive assessment training	42%	60%
Faculty assistance is offered (i.e. paid leaves, stipends, course reductions)	62%	53%

Slightly more than half (58%) of the respondents in State C reported that their faculty governance committees were supportive of student assessment. Slightly less than half (42%) of the respondents reported that their students were supportive of student assessment. While these percentages are comparable to those for all public institutions, support for student assessment is not pervasive throughout State C. Administrators in State C tend to support student assessment through professional development opportunities for faculty in the form of conference funds, workshops, and various forms of assistance. However, less than half of the institutions in State C require faculty to receive training on student assessment, compared to 60% of all public institutions.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate how student assessment relates to faculty evaluation and rewards. Table 18 displays their responses. Even though most institutions in State C encourage faculty to assess their students, this percentage is lower than that for all public

institutions (84% vs. 93%). This finding is somewhat surprising, given the state's expectations of assessment activity. Furthermore, relatively few institutions in State C tie assessment to tenure, promotion, or salary increases. These low percentages are quite similar to those found throughout the country for public institutions. One striking difference is that many more institutions in State C are considering assessment experience in the hiring process (62% vs. 38% for all public institutions). Perhaps this consideration indicates that institutions in State C realize that they need to increase their student assessment activities.

Table 18
Faculty Evaluation and Rewards in State C

Faculty Evaluation and Rewards Policies	Percentage of Institutions in State C	Percentage of all Public Institutions
Faculty encouraged to assess students	84%	93%
Hiring process considers assessment experience	62%	38%
Scholarship on student assessment considered for tenure	37%	43%
Evaluation for salary increases considers student performance	37%	22%
Faculty receive awards for assessment	37%	33%
Willingness to participate in assessment considered in promotion	32%	39%
Evaluation for promotion considers student performance	21%	30%

Respondents also reported on their student-oriented policies on student assessment. As is demonstrated in Table 19, most institutions actively involve students in the assessment process. Only slightly more than a third (37%) use incentives to encourage student participation in assessment.

Table 19
Student-Oriented Policies on Student Assessment

Student Policies	Percentage of Institutions in State C	Percentage of all Public Institutions
Provide students with individual feedback	87%	85%
Inform students about the purpose for assessment	84%	88%
Require students to participate in assessment	88%	88%
Encourage participation with incentives	37%	40%

Institutional Impacts of Student Assessment

In addition to exploring institutional approaches to and support for student assessment, our survey results allow us to examine the impacts institutions ascribe to their assessment efforts. Several questions in the survey relate to changing and improving the learning process. Five of these variables are listed in Table 20. A majority of institutions in State C are using assessment data to create and or modify their academic support services, general education curriculum, instructional methods, and other academic programs. These initiatives demonstrate an effort to use assessment results to improve the learning process.

Table 20
Institutional Actions Using Student Assessment Data

Institutional Actions	Action Taken/Data on Assessment Influential in State C	Action Taken/Data on Assessment Influential for all Public Institutions
Modify academic support services	73%	63%
Revise gen ed curriculum	65%	57%
Modify instructional methods	62%	60%
Design/reorganize academic programs	54%	62%
Revise academic mission	42%	41%

Survey respondents also reported whether they have monitored how student assessment impacts various faculty activities. Table 21 displays how respondents in State C answered these questions. When institutions monitor the impact of student assessment on these four faculty-related variables, they tend to find that their assessment efforts have had positive impacts. Several institutional representatives in State C believe that student assessment has led to changes in instructional methods used by faculty and the prevalence of discussions of undergraduate education. Only a small number of institutions are examining whether assessment is impacting faculty in terms of their interest in teaching and their satisfaction in general.

Table 21
Student Assessment Impacts on Faculty Activities in State C

Impact	Number of Institutions Monitoring	Number of Institutions Finding Positive Impact
Changes in Instructional Methods Used	13	11
Discussions of Undergraduate Education	10	8
Faculty Interest in Teaching	7	5
Faculty Satisfaction	4	2

Survey respondents also reported how engaging in student assessment had impacted student performance. Table 22 summarizes these responses. Of those institutions that are monitoring, not all are finding that their assessment initiatives have positive impacts on student achievement. Less than half of the institutions in State C are attempting to link their assessment activities to student grades.

Table 22
Student Assessment Impacts on Student Performance

Impact	Number of Institutions Monitoring	Number of Institutions Finding Positive Impact
Student retention or graduation rates	16	9
Student achievement on external exams	11	8
Student grade performance	11	7
Student satisfaction	5	3

State C Summary

Whereas improving teaching and learning are both reported as assessment policy objectives by the state officer in State C, neither is reported as a policy outcome. Yet all 26 institutions responding to the ISSA reported that improving faculty instructional performance and improving undergraduate student performance were important reasons for conducting student assessment. Clearly, there is agreement between the state and the institutions on the

importance of improving teaching and learning. Beyond this agreement, however, there are a number of discrepancies.

While the state has a strong assessment mandate in place, only 25% of responding institutions in State C reported a faculty committee that addresses assessment on their campuses. The percentage of State C's institutions that encourage faculty to assess students, while at 84%, still lags behind the national average of 93%. This is all despite the fact that State C has drawn clear links between student assessment and state educational goals. State C's assessment policy also mandates the assessment of general education programs at all public institutions. But 35% of responding institutions do not collect data on students' general education competencies.

In terms of faculty rewards and incentives for engaging in assessment work, less than 40% of institutions in State C consider assessment when making salary and/or promotion decisions. Yet 62% of State C's institutions indicate on the survey that they look at assessment experience when hiring. This is an interesting disconnect: assessment is a factor in hiring but not in promoting or compensation. Even more interesting is the fact that State C's average of 62% in this area is well above the national average of 38%. Perhaps as institutions bring more and more people with assessment experience into the state, there will be an increased value assigned to such activity.

Conclusions

There are at least three main themes that emerge from the preceding analysis that have a direct bearing on the future of assessment at the state and institutional levels: (1) the extent to which there is agreement between the states and the institutions on the importance of improving teaching and learning;(2) the extent to which there is confusion, at the institutional level, about state assessment requirements; and (3) the extent to which there is explicit evidence of institutional commitment to assessment.

Agreement

Based on our survey results, there does seem to be one point on which states and institutions concur: the importance of improving teaching and learning as a purpose of assessment activity. Despite the strong state mandates in these three states, institutions seem to believe that improving teaching and learning is an important reason for engaging in assessment.

Most institutions also responded that meeting state guidelines and reporting information to the state were important reasons to engage in assessment.

Confusion

Despite the agreement that meeting state reporting requirements is important, there was considerable confusion and uncertainty about the nature of state assessment requirements. This uncertainty manifested itself in a variety of ways. Most fundamentally, there was some doubt about whether state assessment requirements existed at all. In State A, two of twelve institutions reported that there was no state assessment plan, while in State C, five of twenty-six states reported no state assessment plan. (In State B, the confusion--on this point, at least--seems to have been eliminated; all ten institutions reported a state assessment plan.)

Although these percentages are not large (17% in State A and 19% in State C), they reflect that institutional understanding, or awareness, of state assessment plans is not universal, and at least some of the institutions are not "getting the message" the state is sending. And even if institutions agree that a state assessment plan exists, they do not necessarily agree on what the plan requires; in all three states, institutional reports diverged rather dramatically on the plan's specifics. In State B, institutions disagreed about whether the state plan called for state-mandated or institutionally-driven indicators, and in States A and C, institutions varied in their perceptions concerning whether the state plan required evidence of assessment activities.

Confusion about the manner in which the assessment plan was developed is also widespread. In all three states, there was disagreement among institutions about whether the assessment plan was developed exclusively at the state level, or if the state and its institutions had worked together in crafting the assessment plan. There is some uncertainty regarding the effects of a state-required assessment plan. These findings support Ewell & Boyer's (1988) findings that unclear communication was a significant problem in states with mandated assessment plans.

Commitment

It is, of course, essential that there is institutional commitment to a state-mandated assessment plan. The extent to which institutions in these three case study states have committed themselves to assessment varied somewhat. In States A and C, one-quarter of institutions reported the presence of faculty committees on their campuses that addressed assessment, while

the figure stood at one-half for State B. In all 3 states, at least 25% of the respondents said their faculty governance committees were *not* supportive of assessment and at least 50% said their students were *not* supportive of assessment. The extent to which assessment can impact the teaching and learning process may be limited by the lack of widespread support for assessment on these campuses. Finally, while professional development opportunities exist in all 3 states, in each state, fewer than 40% of the respondents said they evaluate and/or reward faculty for assessment. This reluctance on behalf of administrators to tie evaluations and rewards to student assessment activities and results may indicate a lack of commitment to assessment.

Implications

The preceding analysis has implications for the formulation and implementation of assessment policy in public higher education. The first and most important of these policy implications is the need for improved communication and understanding between states and institutions regarding assessment. In some cases, it may be that a state legislature develops an assessment plan that is misinformed and poorly constructed. If so, communication from institutions to the legislature has broken down; they have not provided the legislature with the necessary information to craft an efficient and effective assessment plan. Legislatures need the input, and the feedback, from institutions to know what will and will not work in an assessment plan, and to secure the involvement of the institutions in the implementation of the plan. After all, regardless of the quality of the assessment plan, institutions must "buy in" to it or the plan will not work.

In other cases, institutions may not be clearly articulating what they are accomplishing to the legislature. The state officer in one of our three states observed that institutions could not describe or explain the connection between assessment and any "concrete" signs of improvement, and thus the legislators mistakenly "assumed nothing was happening." In an era of increasing fiscal and political accountability for every public tax dollar spent, state legislators are anxious to ensure that funds allocated to higher education are spent proficiently.

Legislatures, in turn, must telegraph their intentions clearly to institutions. What data does the legislature want the institutions to provide in their assessment reports? Are legislators more concerned with fiscal efficiency than the improvement of undergraduate education? Is the

top priority given to students' scores on standardized examinations? Will funding be linked to institutional performance, and if so, in what way? Legislators and institutional leaders will not always agree on these and other related issues, but the key is to make certain each side knows what the other side thinks. There may even be, as there were in each of the case study states analyzed in this paper, institutions that view the state-mandated assessment plan as adverse to their own assessment activities. If that is the case, these concerns should be addressed before more tension and ill will are generated.

As mentioned earlier, an assessment plan is only as good as the institutional commitment to the plan. Without the support of the faculty, an assessment plan is virtually doomed to failure. In the case study states examined here, no more than one-half of any state's institutions had faculty committees that addressed assessment, and at least 25% of faculty committees and 50% of students are not supportive of assessment. These figures assume even greater significance when it is remembered that each of these states does, in fact, have high-profile, state-mandated assessment plans. The lack of institutional assessment activity, or discernible commitment to assessment, in all three states comes as something of a surprise.

Finally, it is interesting to observe that in all three states, institutions report that the assessment they are conducting has a greater impact on improving teaching than on improving student learning. This difference in impacts may simply be a function of institutions tending to measure changes in teaching more than they attempt to gauge changes in student performance. Related to this point is the matter of grades. Grades are traditionally the most common and obvious means of measuring student learning; if such learning were improving, higher grades should reflect this. But very few institutions are linking grades to assessment, which is somewhat surprising. Perhaps greater linkages between grades and assessment would result in more tangible evidence that assessment does, in fact, have an impact on learning. Further research in this area would be particularly useful.

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